

A VOCABULARY FOR DESCRIBING LANGUAGE

TONE

TONE (POSITIVE)

Happiness

amiable*	cheery	contented*	ecstatic	elevated*
elevated*	enthusiastic	exuberant*	joyful	jubilant*
sprightly*				

Pleasure

cheerful	enraptured*	peaceful	playful	pleasant
satisfied	amused	appreciative	whimsical*	

Friendliness, Courtesy

accommodating*	approving	caressing	comforting	compassionate
confiding	cordial*	courteous	forgiving	gracious*
helpful	indulgent*	kindly	obliging*	pitying
polite	sociable	solicitous*	soothing	sympathetic
tender	tolerant	trusting		

Animation

ardent*	breathless	brisk	crisp	eager
excited	earnest*	ecstatic	energetic	exalted*
feverish*	hasty	hearty	hopeful	inspired
lively	passionate	rapturous*	vigorous*	impassioned*

Romance

affectionate	amorous*	erotic*	fanciful*	ideal*
lustful	sensual*	tender		

Tranquility

calm	hopeful	meditative*	optimistic	serene
relaxed	soothing	spiritual	dreamy	

TONE (NEUTRAL)

General

authoritative*	baffled*	ceremonial	clinical*	detached*
disbelieving	factual	formal	informative	learned
matter-of-fact	nostalgic*	objective*	questioning	reminiscent*
restrained*	sentimental*	shocked	urgent	

Rational/Logical

admonitory*	argumentative	candid*	coaxing	critical
curious	deliberate	didactic*	doubting	explanatory
frank*	incredulous*	indignant*	innocent	insinuating*
instructive	oracular*	pensive*	persuasive	pleading
preoccupied*	puzzled	sincere	studied*	thoughtful
uncertain	unequivocal*	probing*		

Self-Control

solemn*	serious	serene	simple	mild
gentle	temperate*	imperturbable*	nonchalant*	cool
wary*	cautious	prudent*		

Apathy

blasé*	bored	colorless	defeated	dispassionate*
dry*	dull	feeble*	helpless	hopeless

indifferent*
sluggish*
vacant*

inert*
stoical*

languid*
sophisticated*

monotonous*

resigned*

TONE (HUMOR/IRONY/SARCASM)

amused
condescending*
facetious*
ironic*
mocking
ribald*
scornful*
whimsical*
playful

bantering*
contemptuous*
flippant*
irreverent*
mock-serious*
ridiculing
sharp
wry*
hilarious

bitter
cynical*
giddy*
joking
patronizing*
sarcastic
silly
belittling
uproarious

caustic*
disdainful*
humorous
malicious*
pompous*
sardonic*
taunting
haughty*

comical
droll*
insolent*
mock-heroic*
quizzical*
satiric*
teasing
insulting

TONE (NEGATIVE)

General

accusing
artificial
childish
condescending
disgruntled*
harsh
insulting
shameful
threatening

aggravated*
audacious*
choleric*
contradictory
disgusted
hateful
irritated
superficial
uninterested

agitated*
belligerent*
coarse*
critical
disinterested
hurtful
manipulative*
surly*

angry
bitter
cold
desperate
passive
indignant*
obnoxious*
testy*

arrogant
brash*
condemnatory
disappointed
furious
inflammatory*
quarrelsome

Sadness

despairing
melancholy*

despondent*
maudlin*

foreboding*
regretful

gloomy
tragic

bleak

Pain

annoyed
disgusted
mournful
sorrowful
uneasy*

biter
dismal*
pathetic
sour
vexed*

bored
fretful*
plaintive*
sulky
worried

crushed
irritable
querulous*
sullen"

disappointed
miserable
sore
troubled

Unfriendliness

accusing
disparaging*
severe

belittling
impudent*
spiteful

boorish*
piteless
suspicious

cutting
reproving*
unscociable

derisive*
scolding
reproachful*

Anger

belligerent*
indignant*

furious
enraged

livid*

wrathful*

savage

Passion

fierce
insane
reckless

frantic*
impetuous*
wild

greedy
impulsive*

voracious*
jealous

hysterical
nervous

Arrogance/Self-Importance

boastful
pompous*
self-righteous*
domineering
knowing
resolute*

bold
supercilious*
assured
egotistical
lofty
sententious*

condescending
pedantic*
confident
imperious*
peremptory*
stiff

contemptuous
didactic*
defiant
impressive
profound*
saucy*

pretentious*
bombastic*
dignified
smug*
proud

Sorrow/Fear/Worry

aggravated	anxious	apologetic*	apprehensive*	concerned
confused	depressed	disturbed	embarrassing	fearful
grave*	hollow*	morose*	nervous	numb
ominous*	paranoid*	pessimistic	poignant*	remorseful*
serious	staid*	enigmatic*		

Submission/Timidity

aghast*	alarmed	ashamed	astonished	astounded
awed	contrite*	self-deprecatory*	docile*	fawning*
groveling*	ingratiating*	meek*	modest*	obedient]
obsequious*	resigned	respectful	reverent*	servile*
shy	submissive*	surprised	sycophantic*	terrified
timid	tremulous*	unpretentious*	willing	

VERBS

These verbs will be especially effective *when the subject is the author or a character*. They are excellent *replacements for "be" verbs* and instrumental in the formulation of *thesis* and *theme* statements. Careful use of these verbs can result in precise identification of an author's *purpose*. Follow your teacher's directions to categorize the verbs as *transitive*, *intransitive*, *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*.

VERBS FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS

accentuates	accepts	achieves	adopts	advocates*
affects	alleviates	allows	alludes*	alters*
analyzes	approaches	argues	ascertains*	assesses*
assumes	attacks	attempts	attributes*	avoids
bases	believes	challenges	changes	characterizes
chooses	chronicles	claims	comments	compares
compels*	completes	concerns	concludes	condescends
conducts	conforms	confronts*	considers	contents*
contests*	contrasts	contributes	conveys	convinces
defines	defies	demonstrates	depicts*	describes
delineates*	despises	details	determines	develops
deviates*	differentiates*	differs	directs	disappoints
discovers	discusses	displays	disputes	disrupts*
distinguishes	distorts*	downplays	dramatizes	elevates
elicits*	emphasizes	encounters	enhances	enriches
enumerates*	envisions	evokes	excludes	expands
experiences	explains	expresses	extends	extrapolates*
fantasizes	focuses	forces	foreshadows	functions
generalizes*	guides	heightens	highlights	hints
holds	honors	identifies	illustrates	illuminates
imagines	impels*	implies*	includes	indicates
infers*	inspires	intends	interprets	interrupts
inundates*	justifies	juxtaposes*	lambasts"	laments*
lampoons*	lists	maintains	makes	manages
manipulates	minimizes	moralizes*	muses*	notes
observes	opposes	organizes	overstates	outlines
patronizes*	performs	permits	personifies*	persuades
ponders*	portrays	postulates*	prepares	presents
presumes	produces	projects	promotes	proposes
provides	qualifies*	questions	rationalizes	reasons
recalls	recites	recollects	records	recounts
reflects	refers	regards	regrets	rejects
represents	results	reveals	ridicules	satirizes*
seems	sees	selects	specifies	speculates*
states	strives*	suggests	summarizes	supplies

supports	suppresses*	symbolizes	sympathizes	traces
understands	vacillates*	values	verifies*	

VERBS TO USE INSTEAD OF EXEMPLIFIES

appears	asserts	attests to	certifies	confirms
connotes*	corroborates*	defines	demonstrates	denotes*
depicts	discloses*	elucidates*	endorses*	establishes
evinces*	exhibits	expounds*	exposes	intimates*
manifests*	points to	proves	ratifies*	relates
shows	substantiates*	suggests	typifies*	upholds
validates*				

ADJECTIVES FOR USE IN LITERARY/RHETORICAL DISCUSSION

DESCRIBING THE AUTHOR

cultured	intellectual	erudite*	well-read	sagacious*
sensible	rational	philosophic*	analytical	imaginative
perceptive	visionary*	prophetic*	optimistic	broad-minded*
idealistic*	spiritual	orthodox*	unorthodox*	sympathetic
sophisticated*	original	whimsical*	humorous	conservative*
liberal*	progressive*	radical*	reactionary*	unprejudiced
realistic*	romantic*	shallow	superficial	bigoted
opinionated*	intolerant	hypocritical*	fanatical*	provincial*
narrow-minded*	sentimental	skeptical*	cynical*	

DESCRIBING STYLE/CONTENT

lucid*	graphic*	intelligible*	explicit*	precise
exact	concise*	succinct*	condensed*	pithy*
piquant*	aphoristic*	syllogistic*	allusive*	metaphorical
poetic	prosaic*	plain	simple	homespun*
pure	vigorous*	forceful	eloquent*	sonorous*
fluent	glib*	natural	restrained*	smooth
polished*	classical	artistic	bombastic*	extravagant
rhetorical*	turgid*	pompous*	grandiose*	obscure*
vague	diffuse*	verbose*	pedantic*	ponderous*
ungraceful	harsh	abrupt*	labored*	awkward
unpolished	crude*	vulgar*	formal	artificial
utilitarian*	humanistic*	pragmatic*	naturalistic*	impressionistic*
subjective*	melodramatic*	fanciful*	authentic*	plausible*
credible*	recondite*	controversial	mystical*	improbable*
absurd	trivial	commonplace	heretical*	

DESCRIBING DICTION

high or formal	low or informal	neutral	precise	exact
concrete	abstract*	plain	simple	homespun
esoteric*	learned	cultured	literal*	figurative*
connotative*	symbolic	picturesque*	sensuous*	literary
provincial*	colloquial*	slang*	idiomatic*	neologistic*
inexact	euphemistic*	trite*	obscure*	pedantic*
bombastic*	grotesque	vulgar*	jargon*	emotional
obtuse*	moralistic*	ordinary	scholarly	insipid*
proper	pretentious*	old-fashioned		

DESCRIBING SYNTAX

loose*	periodic*	balanced*	interrupted	simple*
compound*	complex*	compound-complex*	declarative*	interrogative*
imperative*	exclamatory*	telegraphic*	antithetic*	inverted*
euphonic*	rhythmical	epigrammatic*	emphatic	incoherent

rambling	tortuous	jerky	cacophonous*	monotonous
spare	austere*	unadorned*	jumbled	chaotic
obfuscating*	journalistic*	terse*	laconic*	mellifluous*
musical	lilting*	lyrical*	elegant	solid
thudding	dry	ornate*	elaborate	flowery
erudite*	grating*	staccato*	abrupt*	sprawling

DESCRIBING ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE

spatial*	chronological	flashback	flash forward*	in media res*
step-by-step				

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS (Great substitutions for *pretty* and *ugly*!)

Physical Qualities

manly	virile*	robust*	hardy*	sturdy
strapping*	stalwart*	muscular	brawny*	lovely
fair	comely*	handsome	dainty	delicate
graceful	elegant	shapely	attractive	winsome*
ravishing*	dapper*	immaculate	adroit*	dexterous*
adept*	skillful	agile*	nimble*	active
lively	spirited*	vivacious*	weak	feeble*
sickly	frail	decrepit*	emaciated*	cadaverous*
effeminate*	unwomanly	hideous	homely*	course*
unkempt*	slovenly*	awkward	clumsy	ungainly*
graceless	bizarre*	grotesque	incongruous*	ghastly
repellent*	repugnant*	repulsive	odious*	invidious*
loathsome*				

Mental Qualities (Great substitutions for *smart* and *stupid*! Which comments would you like to see on your papers?)

educated	erudite*	scholarly	wise	astute*
intellectual	precocious*	capable	competent	gifted
apt*	rational	reasonable	sensible	shrewd*
prudent*	observant	clever	ingenious*	inventive
subtle*	cunning*	crafty*	wily*	unintelligent
unschooled*	unlettered*	ignorant	illiterate*	inane*
irrational	puerile*	foolish	fatuous*	vacuous*
simple	thick-skulled*	idiotic	imbecilic*	witless*
deranged*	demented*			

Moral Qualities (Great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

idealistic*	innocent	virtuous*	faultless	righteous*
guileless*	upright*	exemplary	chaste*	pure
undefiled*	temperate*	abstemious*	austere*	ascetic*
puritanical*	truthful	honorable	trustworthy	straightforward*
decent	respectable	wicked	corrupt*	degenerate*
notorious*	vicious	incorrigible*	dissembling*	infamous*
immoral*	unprincipled*	reprobate*	depraved*	indecent*
ribald*	vulgar*	intemperate*	sensual*	dissolute*
deceitful	dishonest	unscrupulous*	dishonorable*	base*
vile*	foul*	recalcitrant*	philandering*	

Spiritual Qualities (More great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

religious	reverent	pious*	devout*	faithful
regenerate*	holy	saintly	angelic	skeptical*
agnostic*	atheistic*	irreligious*	impious*	irreverent*
profane*	sacrilegious*	materialistic	carnal*	godless
diabolic*	fiendlike*	blasphemous*	unregenerate*	

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shows	substantiates*	suggests	typifies*	upholds
validates*				

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sophisticated*	original	whimsical*	humorous	conservative*
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realistic*	romantic*	shallow	superficial	bigoted
opinionated*	intolerant	hypocritical*	fanatical*	provincial*
narrow-minded*	sentimental	skeptical*	cynical*	

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absurd	trivial	commonplace	heretical*	

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spare	austere*	unadorned*	jumbled	chaotic
obfuscating*	journalistic*	terse*	laconic*	mellifluous*
musical	lilting*	lyrical*	elegant	solid
thudding	dry	ornate*	elaborate	flowery
erudite*	grating*	staccato*	abrupt*	sprawling

DESCRIBING ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE/POINT OF VIEW

spatial*	chronological	flashback	flash forward*	in media res*
step-by-step	objective*	subjective*	nostalgic*	reminiscent
contemplative*	reflective*	clinical*	impersonal*	dramatic*
omniscient*	limited*			

DESCRIBING IMAGERY (Substitute these precise adjectives for less precise ones such as *vivid*, *colorful*, and *powerful*.)

bucolic*	pastoral*	gustatory*	olfactory*	tactile*
kinetic*	kinesthetic*	sensual*	sacred	sexual
auditory*	religious	animal	war/military	chaotic
of death, decay, decomposition				

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS (Great substitutions for *pretty* and *ugly*!)

Physical Qualities

manly	virile*	robust*	hardy*	sturdy
strapping*	stalwart*	muscular	brawny*	lovely
fair	comely*	handsome	dainty	delicate
graceful	elegant	shapely	attractive	winsome*
ravishing*	dapper*	immaculate	adroit*	dexterous*
adept*	skillful	agile*	nimble*	active
lively	spirited*	vivacious*	weak	feeble*
sickly	frail	decrepit*	emaciated*	cadaverous*
effeminate*	unwomanly	hideous	homely*	course*
unkempt*	slovenly*	awkward	clumsy	ungainly*
graceless	bizarre*	grotesque	incongruous*	ghastly
repellent*	repugnant*	repulsive	odious*	invidious*
loathsome*				

Mental Qualities (Great substitutions for *smart* and *stupid*! Which comments would you like to see on your papers?)

educated	erudite*	scholarly	wise	astute*
intellectual	precocious*	capable	competent	gifted
apt*	rational	reasonable	sensible	shrewd*
prudent*	observant	clever	ingenious*	inventive
subtle*	cunning*	crafty*	wily*	unintelligent
unschooled*	unlettered*	ignorant	illiterate*	inane*
irrational	puerile*	foolish	fatuous*	vacuous*
simple	thick-skulled*	idiotic	imbecilic*	witless*
deranged*	demented*	articulate*	eloquent*	

Moral Qualities (Great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

idealistic*	innocent	virtuous*	faultless	righteous*
guileless*	upright*	exemplary	chaste*	pure
undefiled*	temperate*	abstentious*	austere*	ascetic*
puritanical*	truthful	honorable	trustworthy	straightforward*
decent	respectable	wicked	corrupt*	degenerate*
notorious*	vicious	incorrigible*	dissembling*	infamous*
immoral*	unprincipled*	reprobate*	depraved*	indecent*
ribald*	vulgar*	intemperate*	sensual*	dissolute*
deceitful	dishonest	unscrupulous*	dishonorable*	base*
vile*	foul*	recalcitrant*	philandering*	opportunistic*

Spiritual Qualities (More great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

religious	reverent	pious*	devout*	faithful
regenerate*	holy	saintly	angelic	skeptical*
agnostic*	atheistic*	irreligious*	impious*	irreverent*
profane*	sacrilegious*	materialistic	carnal*	godless
diabolic*	fiendlike*	blasphemous*	unregenerate*	altruistic*
charitable				

Social Qualities (Terrific substitutions for *nice* and *mean*!)

civil*	amicable*	contentious*	unpolished*	sullen*
tactful*	courteous	cooperative	genial*	affable*
hospitable*	gracious*	amiable*	cordial*	congenial*
convivial*	jovial*	jolly	urbane*	suave*
anti-social*	acrimonious*	quarrelsome	antagonistic*	misanthropic*
discourteous	impudent*	impolite	insolent*	ill-bred
ill-mannered	unrefined	rustic*	provincial*	boorish*
brusque*	churlish*	fawning*	obsequious*	sniveling*
grumpy	fractious*	crusty*	peevish*	petulant*
waspish*	taciturn*	reticent*	gregarious*	garrulous*

NOUNS FOR USE IN LITERARY/RHETORICAL DISCUSSION***ANALYZING CHARACTERS***

foil*	nemesis*	adversary*	protagonist*	antagonist*
confidante*	doppelganger*	narrator (unknown, reliable, naïve)		

ANALYZING STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION/POINT OF VIEW

foreshadowing	epiphany*	analogy*	extended metaphor*	shifts
parallel structure	comparison/contrast	transition	sequence	definition
juxtaposition*	anecdote*	frame story*	arrangement	classification
categorization	placement	person (first, second, third)*		
perspective (chronological, geographic, emotional, political)*				

ANALYZING SYNTAX

repetition	parallelism	anaphora*	asyndeton*	polysyndeton*
subject*	predicate*	object*	direct object*	indirect object*
phrase*	clause*	infinitive*	participle*	gerund*
modifier*	dependent clause*	independent clause*	subordinate clause*	preposition*
conjunction*	interjection*	deliberate fragment*	appositive*	emphatic
appositive*	semicolon*	colon*	rhetorical question*	noun*
comma	pronoun*	proper noun*	common noun*	collective noun*
abstract noun*	concrete noun*	dialogue*	apostrophe*	chiasmus*
parenthetical expression	footnote	capitalization for effect	inversion*	antecedent*
hyphen*	dash*	active voice*	passive voice*	tense
catalogue*	compound nouns/adjectives			

IDENTIFYING GENRE/PURPOSE

novel	novella*	autobiography*	memoir*	biography
letter	sermon	speech	treatise*	abstract*
précis*	synopsis	critique*	personal narrative	journey
travelogue	essay*	diatribe*	polemic*	commentary*
farce*	conceit*	editorial*	tirade*	review
assessment	eulogy*	elegy*	parody*	allegory*
apology	soliloquy*	monologue*	portrayal	archetype*
fable*	argument	verse		

IDENTIFYING SOUND DEVICES

alliteration*	assonance*	consonance*	repetition*	rhyme*
end rhyme*	feminine rhyme*	masculine rhyme*	meter*	slant rhyme*
incremental rhyme*				

THE LANGUAGE OF ARGUMENT

VERBS

attack	charge	claim	propose	defend
challenge	qualify	counter	repudiate*	allege*
validate	confirm	affirm*	argue	assume
answer	agree/disagree	verify	resolve	concede*
grant*	generalize	specify	debate	dispute
assert				

NOUNS

warrant	validity	plausibility*	practicality	proposal
solution	resolution	bias	credibility	accountability
vested interest	conflict of interests	enthymeme*	pathos*	ethos*
logos*	counterargument	premise*	sylogism*	deduction*
induction*	fallacy*	ad hominem	exigence*	speaker
audience	purpose	message	precedent*	testimonial*
rebuttal*	antithesis*	non sequitur*	circular reasoning*	bandwagon*
refutation	slippery slope*	anecdote*	advocacy*	rhetoric*
invective*	proponent*	assertion	adherent*	red herring*
qualifier*	begging the question*	justification	cause/effect	

THEME VOCABULARY

Brendan Kenny's List of Abstract Ideas for Forming Theme Statements:

alienation	ambition	appearance v. reality	betrayal	bureaucracy
chance/fate/luck	cruelty/violence	loyalty/disloyalty	journey (literal or psychological)	instinct
despair/discontent*/disillusionment*	home	domination/suppression	heart v. reason	identity
heaven/paradise/Utopia*	loneliness/solitude*	illusion*/innocence	initiation*	music/dance
courage/cowardice	the supernatural	defeat/failure	memory/the past	women/feminism
social status (class*)	law/justice	time/eternity	war	mob psychology
children	duty	custom/tradition	materialism	guilt
dreams/fantasies	escape	exile*	education	patriotism
persistence*/perseverance*	prophecy	faith/loss of faith	family/parenthood	poverty
game/contests/sports	scapegoat/victim	prejudice	ritual/ceremony	greed
free will/will power		falsity/pretence	repentance*	
revenge/retribution*				